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Oscillations in Iranian EFL Teachers' Motivation during Online Instruction: The Role of Teachers' Seniority and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

As a dynamic and multifaceted entity, motivation is prone to constant change under the influence of a great many factors including context, task, group dynamics and learner characteristics. Informed by the dearth of research on motivational fluctuations among the teacher community, the researchers in the current study strove to investigate the factors giving rise to Iranian EFL teachers' motivational oscillations during the practice of online teaching. Thus, opting for a mixed methods research design, the researchers explored the role of emotional intelligence (EI) and seniority (teaching experience) in determining teachers' motivational status and intensity in the quantitative phase. However, in the qualitative phase the researchers tapped into the teachers' perceptions concerning the overriding factors bringing about their motivational fluctuations. A total of 55 teachers with varying degrees of teaching experience ranging from one year to 28 years participated in the study. To gather data for the quantitative phase, Bar-On's (1997) emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i), and Motometer were utilized. However, in the qualitative phase, the data from teacher narratives and interview responses were consulted. The quantitative results via applying Mann Whitney U test revealed that though emotional intelligence and seniority both played a role in teachers' motivational level, their influences were not statistically significant. Also, as regards the results of data analysis for the qualitative phase, several factors were pinpointed to underlie the teachers' motivational changes during online teaching experience, including teaching materials, time intervals during the session, instructional topics, learner factors and internet connection problems. The findings are thought to have fruitful implications for EFL teachers, particularly in sensitizing them toward the role of different factors in their motivational changes.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, motivational fluctuations, teaching experience, virtual learning

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1. Introduction

Motivation is indisputably a key determiner of language learning success according to multifarious research findings (e.g., Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2019; Dörnyei, 1998, 2005, 2009; Gardner, 2010; Lamb et al. 2020). Once regarded as a uni-dimensional and static entity, characterized by dichotomous classifications such as extrinsic/intrinsic and instrumental/integrative types, motivation is now being viewed as a dynamic entity which is in constant state of flux due to various factors. This novel conceptualization of motivation as a fluctuating attribute in individuals has its roots in Larsen-Freeman's (1997, 2019) complex dynamic systems theory (CDST).

Since the inception of this alternative approach to motivation, there has been an outburst in research addressing the dynamic nature of motivation in learning contexts (e.g., Azarnoosh et al. 2015; Campbell & Storch, 2011; Dörnyei, 2019; Kruk, 2016, 2022; Mohammadi & Alavinia, 2021; Mohammadi et al. 2023; Mohammadzadeh & Alavinia, 2021; Ortega, 2009; Pawlak, 2012; Pawlak et al. 2014; Waninge et al. 2014; Yaghoubinejad et al. 2016). Though literature, particularly in the recent years, abounds with probes into motivational fluctuations, it appears that most, if not all, such research has addressed changes occurring in learners' motivational levels owing to miscellaneous factors, and hence the concept of oscillations in teacher motivation has remained an overly underresearched area.

Perhaps one of the prominent turning points which gave rise to an upsurge of attention toward teacher motivation was the publication of the seminal book by Richardson, et al. (2014), which according to its reviewers and raters (e.g., Alavinia & Isavi, 2016) featured as a comprehensive and full-fledged collection of key concepts in teacher motivation, acting as a roadmap for interested researchers and leading them through fresh avenues of research on the issue. However, in view of the paramountcy of teacher motivation, in general, and dynamic nature of motivation, in particular, it seems it behooves us to turn toward addressing fluctuations in teachers' motivational levels as a new, unprecedented line of inquiry. Thus, informed by this lacuna in the literature on motivational studies, the current researchers opted for probing the changes occurring in teachers' motivation during the online practice of teaching. In so doing, the role of teachers' seniority (teaching experience) and emotional intelligence (EI) in their motivational fluctuations was also examined.

It must also be noted that another significant feature that distinguishes the current research from its possible counterparts is that it focused on teachers' motivational fluctuations during the online practice of teaching. As researchers like Kyewski and Kramer (2018) contend, there is a dire need for further investigation on the motivational issues in online learning environments to be able to reach better conclusions concerning the factors leading to demotivation in such learning conditions. Thus, the main novelty of the current investigation lies in its attempt to gauge the possible role of teachers' EI and seniority in directing their motivational fluctuations in the process of online teaching. Also, probing the factors underlying teachers' motivational fluctuations, as the other objective of the current scrutiny, may constitute the other novelty aspect of the study, owing to the fact that few researchers, to the best of our knowledge, have addressed the status of motivational changes within the teacher community.

2. Literature Review

Moving within the process-oriented framework, and centering on the dynamic view of motivation which emanated from CDST (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2019), the current study tried to investigate the in-flux nature of motivation for language teachers in virtual learning environment (VLE). The second important issue addressed in the current study was emotional intelligence. Though intelligence was previously regarded as a fixed, unilateral and inheritable attribute in individuals which was not prone to change, Gardner's (1983) ground-breaking theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) paved the way for a newfangled conceptualization of intelligence as a non-crystalized and multifaceted entity. Later researchers like Sternberg (1985) continued to work within this framework, and added new perspectives and components to the concept of intelligence. Sternberg's principal contribution to the field of intelligence, successive to his triarchic model, was his trailblazing theory of 'successful intelligence', comprised of three major components known as *analytical intelligence* – "an individual's cognitive processes" – *creative intelligence* – "an individual's insight for coping with new experiences" – and *practical intelligence* – "an individual's ability to adapt and reshape his or her environment" (Arends, 2012, p. 50).

Another avant-garde development in the field of intelligence has been the notion of emotional intelligence, promulgated mainly by Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997). In his pioneering work, Bar-On (1997, p. 14) characterized EI as "an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to

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succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures." Though emotional intelligence has been defined from a variety of vantage points by different researchers, one of the working delineations of the term has been provided by Mortiboys (2005, p. 8) who contends EI is targeted toward "creating a positive emotional climate; recognizing and working with the feelings of yourself and of your learners; using listening skills with groups as well as with individuals; dealing with learners' expectations; and having a developed self-awareness."

A brief glimpse through the literature on EI reveals that high levels of emotional intelligence bring about gaining success in different aspects of educational/academic life. Amid the myriad probes investigating the contribution of EI to teaching and learning success, reference can be made to the works of Alavinia and Ahmadzadeh (2012) highlighting the role of emotional intelligence in lowering burnout levels in a sample of high school EFL teachers, Alavinia and Kurosh (2012) and Hassan et al. (2015) accentuating the correlation between teachers' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, Alavinia and Razmi (2012) underscoring the higher success obtained by emotionally more intelligent EFL learners in terms of metacognitive writing strategy, Noorafshan and Jowkar (2013) and Salavera et al. (2017) both referring to the predictive power of EI for students' creativity, Pashazadeh and Alavinia (2019) demonstrating the correlation between EI and creativity among high school EFL teachers, and Mohammadi et al. (2023) documenting the relationship between teachers' EI and their motivation. Literature is also replete with the studies that have verified the contribution of EI to teaching success (e.g., Abiodullah, et al., 2020; Krishnan & Awang, 2020; Ponmozhi & Ezhilbharathy, 2017) and classroom management efficacy (e.g., Akhtar, 2021; Wahyuddin, 2016).

The third factor investigated in the current study is the role of teacher's seniority (teaching experience) in their motivational fluctuations. According to Stronge (2018), teachers' experience might prove to be crucial for obtaining better educational outcomes from a number of pivotal perspectives. The contributions of teaching experience to teaching success and learning efficacy incorporate the teachers' ability for devising more structured instructional plans, implementing better teaching strategies, having more awareness of the learners' differences and sensitivity toward their needs, likes and dislikes, possessing improved coping skills, developing more preparedness for facing unexpected problems and challenges, and facilitating learner achievement. Teaching experience/seniority is found to have a prominent role in teaching success and learning achievement. The critical review and meta-analysis of 30 articles published since 2003, conducted by Podolsky et al. (2019), revealed that the critical part played by teaching experience in teaching efficacy and student achievement is irrefutable.

Probes into the dynamic nature of motivation have been quite ubiquitous mainly during the last decade or so. Dörnyei (2019) is of the view that motivation is a multidimensional entity, and hence changes in learners' motivation can be ascribed to multiple sources, mainly encompassing learner-related, context-specific and task-driven factors. Nonetheless, a quick glance at the available body of research on the issue reveals that though the studies have taken different orientations, two outstanding foci in this domain have been 1) analyzing context-specific variations in motivation, and 2) task-related motivational changes in learners. Thus, in what follows, the related studies are listed with respect to these two paramount lines of inquiry.

As regards the first research strand, context-driven motivational flux, reference can be made to the work of Campbell and Storch (2011), which was conducted in Australian academic context, and focused on the learning of Chinese as a foreign language. The main instrument utilized by them for gathering data was semi-structured interview. The findings of their study pointed toward the influential impact of learning context as the key determiner for shaping the learners' motivational orientation, and leading to motivational changes along the way. These researchers also contended that training focused on reconstructing learners' L2 selves may empower them to face challenges and remain highly motivated.

In a similar vein, Waninge et al. (2014) scrutinized the ups and downs in the motivational intensity of four students and mainly focused on the short-term fluctuations in the level of their motivation. The main means of data collection used in their study were the motivation/attitude questionnaire, observation and Motometer. As their findings indicated, learners' motivation went through significant changes even during a short time period. These changes, according to them, are attributable to the context of learning.

Another study falling within this category is the research carried out by Mohammadzadeh and Alavinia (2021). Their study strove to find the degree of motivational fluctuations in a cohort of language school learners involved in a task-supported language course. Interviews, teacher observation sheets and Motometers were employed as the main instruments for data collection. The research culminated in highlighting the role of a number of context-dependent

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factors, such as group dynamics and instructional emphasis in shaping the learners' motivational intensity during the course.

Also related to this research strand is the work of Sosin et al. (2024) in which the researchers sought to appraise the weekly fluctuations in students' motivation. Conducted in the academic context in Germany, their study was carried out on a cohort of 488 university students. Another aim of their scrutiny was specifying the linkage between students' motivational changes and their affective well-being. In accordance with the obtained results, the fluctuations in students' motivation had bonds with their affect and well-being.

Quite recently, Sehat et al. (2024) gauged Iranian EFL learners' motivational ups and downs throughout online learning experience. Recruiting the participants from three different contexts, namely school, institute and university, they embarked on analyzing the effect of contextual differences on learners' flow of motivation at different time intervals during the course. Benefiting from Motometer and retrospective thinking as the main means of data collection, they came up with variable context-bound patterns for the participants' motivational fluxes.

Turning to the second research orientation referred to above, i.e. task-related motivational changes, we can mention Kruk's (2013) work, which examined the motivational changes taking place in a sample of senior high school learners from Poland. Using a variety of instruments, including questionnaires, evaluation sheets, learner logs and interest grids, Kruk concluded that the degree of learners' motivation changed both during one session and across sessions. The two notable findings that are gleaned from Kruk's study are the greater motivation experienced by learners in online tasks, and the effect of task types on variations in learners' motivational levels.

In another investigation, MacIntyre and Serroul (2015) gauged the motivational undulations resulting from learners' involvement with task types. To gather data, they made use of oral tasks and idiodynamic ratings. In line with the obtained findings, the researchers evidenced noticeable variation in terms of learners' self-ratings of their motivational intensity induced by different tasks.

In much the same way, Mohammadi and Alavinia (2021) sought to explore the changes in learners' motivational levels can be directed by task type. Performing the study on a sample of high school EFL learners, they employed interviews and Motometers as the means of data collection. Based on the obtained findings, the significant effect of task type on learners' motivational fluctuations was confirmed. More specifically, problem-solving task engendered the greatest amount of motivation in learners, with the second most alluring task being picture-prompted one. Nevertheless, no gender-induced differences were observed in their study in relation to motivational changes.

Informed by the gaps in the literature on motivational studies taking a dynamic perspective, in general, and research on motivational fluctuations in teachers, in particular, the researchers in the current study embarked on probing the factors underlying teachers' motivational fluctuations in virtual learning environment. In so doing, the impact of teachers' experience and emotional intelligence on their motivational changes was also explored. Thus, in accordance with the study objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Do the teachers' motivational fluctuations differ significantly based on their level of emotional intelligence during the process of online instruction?

RQ2: Do the teachers' motivational fluctuations differ significantly based on seniority (being novice or experienced) during the process of online instruction?

RQ3: What factors give rise to teachers' motivational fluctuations during online instruction?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

The current study followed a mixed-methods design. In the quantitative phase, after administrating Bar-On's emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i), and also gathering the demographic data (mainly as regards teaching experience), the participating teachers were required to fill in the Motometers (Motivational Thermometer) intended to gauge their motivational fluctuations during the instructional session. In the qualitative phase, however, the teachers' perceptions regarding the factors underlying their motivational changes were gathered via narratives and interviews.

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3.2 Participants

The participants taking part in the current study (totaling 55) were all Iran Language Institute (ILI) teachers, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in virtual learning environment (VLE). It's worth noting that the majority of teachers attended the study from different ILI branches across West Azerbaijan province, including Urmia, Mahabad, Khoy, Boukan, Salmas, and Maku, and only three teachers came from Ardebil center. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling, and provided the researchers with informed consent at the outset of the study. It's also worth noting that both males and females partook in the study, and in terms of experience, a wide variation existed, with some teachers being novice and others being experienced teachers. The lowest amount of teaching experience possessed by participants was one year, and the highest 28 years.

3.3 Instruments

Being of a mixed-methods nature, the current study relied on the data obtained through questionnaire, Motometer, interview and narrative analysis. As regards the quantitative phase, the data were gathered by means of Bar-On's (1997) emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i), with an appended part for the demographic information (mainly concerning teaching experience), as well as Motometer. For the qualitative phase, however, use was made of narrative frame and interview, to obtain a clearer picture of the status of teachers' fluctuations during a single session.

Bar-On's (1997) EQ-i is a self-report measure that gauges emotionally and socially intelligent behavior. The original version of the inventory encompasses 133 items falling on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale comprises 5 overriding categories as well as 15 subscales. The short and modified version of the questionnaire, which is commonly used in Iran, includes 90 items. It's worth noting that the researchers in the current study made use of this abridged version.

The second instrument employed in the study was Motometer, a tool commonly applied in research on motivational fluctuations. The Motometer used in the study was initially devised by Waninge et al. (2014), intended to estimate the individuals' self-ratings of their motivational state at different time intervals. Thus, following Waninge et al.'s lead, the Motometer administered in the study fell on a scale ranging from 0 (the lowest motivation) to 100 (the highest motivation). The teachers were asked to specify their motivational level at five-minute intervals during the entire teaching process in one session.

Finally, to consolidate the findings and to triangulate data collection procedure, the teachers were requested to cooperate in a semi-structured interview session, and also provide the researchers with narratives concerning the changes occurring in their motivational levels throughout the process of teaching.

3.4 Procedure

At the outset of the study, the researchers briefed the participating teachers on the research aims, and gained informed consent from them to take part in the study. They were also reassured of the anonymity and confidentiality concerns and other ethicality perspectives. Then, Bar-On's (1997) EQ-i, containing a part related to demographic information was administered to all participants.

In the next stage, the participants were given the Motometers, with the purpose of measuring their motivational changes at 5-minute intervals during the whole instructional session. In an attempt to safeguard collating data in a more reliable manner, and to curtail the possible disruptions in the process of conducting research, the participants were informed and oriented beforehand as regards the procedure for filling the Motometers. It must be noted that the data collection for this phase of research was a bit tough and time-consuming because the researchers had to contact the teachers one by one to obtain their filled Motometers. Upon the collection of all Filled Motomeres, the researcher analyzed the motometer sheets, in an attempt to set aside the constant and repeated patterns of motivation, and single out those whose motivational changes followed a wavering and unsteady pattern. These participants with an uneven pattern of fluctuations were then invited to provide the researchers with the reasons underlying their motivational fluctuations through the interview and narrative writing session. The principal question guiding interview and narrative analysis revolved around the factors underlying their motivational fluctuations, and the participants were demanded by the researchers to provide elaborate responses as to the reasons for their motivational changes at different time intervals.

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3.5 Data Analysis

For analyzing the gathered data, primarily the mean score for teachers' motivational fluctuations was calculated. Next, the results of EQ-i were screened for dividing the individuals into different categories based on their EI level. Successive to vetting the EI scores, it was found that only three enjoyed an average level of EI and none were identified with low level of EI. Accordingly, only two groups of teachers were constituted (those with high level of EQ, scoring between 271 and 360, and those with very high level of EQ, scoring within the range of 361 and 450). Afterwards, to analyze research question one, first the mean motivational values were tested for normality, and since they violated the normality conditions, Mann Whitney U test (the non-parametric equivalent of independent samples t-test) was employed.

By the same token, in dealing with the second research question, and to make a comparison between the means obtained by novice and experienced teachers in terms of motivational changes, Mann Whitney U test was again applied, as the data were not normally distributed. Finally, for responding the third research question, which was of a qualitative nature, the teachers' responses amassed from interviews and narratives were transcribed and the main themes were extracted and reported.

4. Results

4.1 Findings Obtained for Research Question One

The first research question investigated the teachers' motivational fluctuations during a single session ensuing from their emotional intelligence level. As mentioned before, the mean motivational values didn't enjoy normal distribution, and hence to compare how teachers' motivational levels differed in terms of their varied emotional intelligence levels, Mann Whitney U test (the non-parametric equivalent of independent samples t-test) was run, the results of which are listed in Tables 1 and 2. It's worth reiterating that since there were only three individuals with an average level of intelligence and none with low level of intelligence based on Bar-On's EQ-i results, only two groups of teachers were formed and compared in the study (those with high level of EQ, scoring between 271 and 360, and those with very high level of EQ, scoring within the range of 361 and 450). Table 1 shows the mean ranks obtained for teachers' emotional intelligence.

Table 1. Mean ranks obtained for mean motivational levels based on differences in emotional intelligence

	Total EI	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Mean Motivation	Very High	20	30.88	617.50
	High	32	23.77	760.50
	Total	52		

As is evident in Table 1, the mean rank obtained for individuals with very high emotional intelligence level is found to be 30.88, while the mean rank for teachers with high emotional intelligence equals 25.56. In other words, the teachers with very high level of motivation are shown to possess a higher degree of motivation, and it can be concluded that emotional intelligence can partially contribute to their motivational intensity. However, to gain better insights into the significance of these differences, the results of Mann Whitney U test are to be consulted. Table 2 reports the results of this test concerning the effect of emotional intelligence level on teachers' motivational fluctuations throughout the instructional session.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U test result for mean motivational levels based on differences in emotional intelligence

	Mean Motivation
Mann-Whitney U	232.500
Wilcoxon W	760.500
Z	-1.648

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Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.099

a. Grouping Variable: Total EI

As is seen in the Table above, the differences among the teachers' mean motivational levels as regards their emotional intelligence are statistically non-significant (p = .09 > .05). Hence, it can be stated that though the differences in teachers' EI partly affect their motivational state (as illustrated in Table 1), the degree of such differences is not so significant (based on Table 2 data). Therefore, the first null hypothesis positing no significant variations in teachers' motivational levels during a single session resulting from differences in their emotional intelligence level is confirmed.

4.2 Findings Obtained for Research Question Two

The second research question examined the differences in teachers' motivational fluctuations during a single session based on seniority (being novice or experienced). As the scores violated the normality conditions, once again Mann-Whitney U test was run on the mean motivational values, the results of which are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Mean ranks obtained for motivational levels based on seniority

	Experience	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Mean Motivation	Higher	23	31.39	722.00
	Lower	32	25.56	818.00
	Total	55		

As illustrated in Table 3, the mean rank obtained for individuals with more seniority and higher teaching experience equals 31.39, whereas the mean rank for less experienced teachers is 25.56. Accordingly, it can be claimed that seniority makes a difference in teachers' motivational intensity, and teachers with higher experience in the current study are found to be endowed with a higher degree of motivation, an issue which will be discussed further in the rest of the article. Nevertheless, to probe the significance of this difference, and the influence of seniority on teachers' motivation, the results of Mann Whitney U test are to be checked. Table 4 depicts the results of this test regarding the effect of seniority and experience on motivational levels throughout the instructional session.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test result regarding the effect of seniority on motivational levels throughout a single instructional session

	Mean Motivation
Mann-Whitney U	290.000
Wilcoxon W	818.000
Z	-1.332
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.183

a. Grouping Variable: Experience

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As the table indicates, there is not a significant difference ($p = .18 > .05$) among the teachers' mean motivational levels in terms of seniority and experience in a single instructional session. Hence, the second null hypothesis stating that teachers' motivational fluctuations during a single session does not differ significantly based on seniority and experience is confirmed.

4.3 Findings Obtained for Research Question Three

The third research question sought to explore the factors underlying teachers' motivational changes during the practice of online teaching. A close investigation of the Motometers filled and submitted by the teachers indicated that a number of participants maintained a fairly stable pattern of motivation during the whole teaching session. Thus, only those individuals with frequent ups and downs in their motivational levels were invited to take part in the interview and narrative session. After collating the interview and narrative data, the participants' responses were transcribed and the overriding themes were extracted. In so doing, the researchers conducted open and axial coding (e.g., Saldana, 2009), by initially analyzing the data to identify the salient patterns and single out the "concepts, properties, and dimensions within the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12), and then looking for connections between/among the categories specified through open coding to come up with more illustrative categories. It's worth noting that two of the researchers coded the data independently, successive to which intercoder reliability was also ensured. The following themes were more conspicuous among the given responses:

4.3.1 The Effect of Teaching Materials

The first theme arising from the analysis of qualitative data was the role of teaching materials in directing the motivational fluctuations. In this regard, one of the participating teachers uttered:

Extract 1

Depending on the class and the material and the level of the class my motivation may change.

A number of other teachers also highlighted the significance of teaching materials for directing the teachers' motivation.

4.3.2 The Role of Different Time Intervals during the Session and Class Timing

Some of the participants were of the view that the elapse of time may act as a motivator for them, and though they are sometimes demotivated or lack sufficient motivation at the beginning of the class, they gradually become more interested as the time goes by. In this regard, one of the teachers said:

Extract 2

The initial time of the session is boring since it is devoted mostly to checking homework.

Confirming the effect of different time intervals during the class on teachers' motivation, another teacher averred:

Extract 3

At first, we check the workbooks and the supplementary books so I think it's boring. When I start teaching, I am motivated so much because I love teaching.

Another teacher, however, argued that class timing and schedule can act as a major factor in creating fluctuations in teachers' motivation:

Extract 4

By the way, time of the class is important for me. Generally, I feel more energetic for classes held in the mornings. However, during online classes whenever I get my expected results and responses which are grammatically correct with proper use of newly learnt vocabulary it makes me feel more motivated.

4.3.3 The Influence of Lessons and Instructional Topics

The other prominent theme emerging from the participants' responses was the role played by different lessons and course topics in sparking and heightening motivation in teachers. In this respect, one of the participating teachers pointed out:

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Extract 5

In my opinion the motivation and effort for teaching every lesson differs among the classes and the terms.

Similarly, another teacher highlighted the role played by different subjects in motivating the teachers by stating:

Extract 6

I believe that the level of motivation is not the same for different subjects ….

The potential of some topics and themes to bring about more motivation in teachers was also underscored by another participant in the following manner:

Extract 7

I often try to spend time planning and preparing lessons, creating engaging activities and finding ways to meet the diverse needs of my students. As for how much I enjoy the lesson, I have a particular passion for its subject or topic and find more enjoyment in teaching that lesson (for example, conversation between a customer and a baker).

4.3.4 The Role of Learner Factors

A couple of teachers pointed to the role of learner factors, such as their eagerness and proficiency level. As a case in point, one of the teachers maintained:

Extract 8

For me, my audience is very important. Whenever, I see my student is highly effortful and eager to learn language it makes me motivated to teach in my optimal mood. At the beginning of the session which we review the previous lesson it makes me energetic to see my student learning.

Another teacher was of the view that students' proficiency level makes a difference and expressed her viewpoint as follows:

Extract 9

My motivation level varies in different classes (based on proficiency levels of students).

The influence of proficiency level as a determining factor for teachers' motivational fluctuations was also underlined by another participant (see Extract 10).

Extract 10

Well, I have online classes for both beginner and intermediate levels. In classes with higher levels of proficiency I`m less concerned about the learners comprehension. While in case of lower proficient learners since I`m caring about their understanding and try to opt for vocabulary and grammar proper to their level of proficiency and this might have an effect on decline of my motivation in that moments.

Still another teacher contended that at times the learners' inattention and lack of concentration demotivates her. She voiced her concern by saying:

Extract 11

Generally, I am a motivated teacher and enjoy teaching foreign language. At the beginning of the session, I usually feel highly motivated. However, sometimes during teaching at the middle of the session I feel that my student is less concentrated on the topic and is not paying enough attention to my talk this is in fact the time I feel a little bit demotivated. Moreover, I devote much worth to disciplinary matters and attending on time. Whenever. They are late I am not feeling good."

4.3.5 The Role of Internet Speed and Network Quality

Some of the participating teachers accentuated the adverse effect of problems with internet speed and network connectivity as the overriding issues making the interaction between the teacher and learners hard, and hence leading to lower levels of teaching motivation. For instance, one of the teachers asserted:

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Extract 12

Before teaching session I am usually highly motivated. I prepare my laptop, connect to the internet, and search for the contents relevant to the theme of the lesson. However, during some sessions we have internet connection failure, which makes me a little bit demotivated and I prefer real classroom teaching to virtual online teaching.

In like manner, another teacher referred to this issue by saying:

Extract 13

In online classes I feel a lack of actual face to face interaction and it makes me a little bit hesitated about discerning the proper moment of giving feedback to my student.

Finally, the analysis of the qualitative data presented in this section culminated in finding five overarching themes, i.e. *the effect of teaching materials, the role of different time intervals during the session and class timing, the influence of lessons and instructional topics, the role of learner factors* and *the role of internet speed and network quality.* Thus, it can be concluded that the teachers' motivation fluctuates based on a host of different factors, the most important of which were reported in this section.

5. Discussion

The analysis of obtained data for the first research question which explored the teachers' motivational fluctuations during a single session resulting from their emotional intelligence revealed that though the differences in teachers' EI affected their motivational state, the influence of teachers' EI on their motivational fluctuations was not statistically significant. The failure of the current researchers to come up with a significant difference in teachers' mean motivational level resulting from their emotional intelligence can be justified on account of the fact that very few individuals with average EI and none with low EI were encountered in the chosen sample, hence restricting the comparison merely to two groups of individuals with high and very high levels of EI.

The contribution of teachers' EI to their motivational status as demonstrated in the current study, though not statistically significant, resonates with the finding obtained by Mohammadi et al. (2023) who represented the relationship between teachers' EI and their motivation. A high level of emotional intelligence has also been found to be positively correlated with teachers' self-efficacy (e.g., Alavinia & Kurosh, 2012; Anwar et al. 2021; Hassan et al. 2015; Moafian & Ghanizadeh, 2009; Valente et al. 2020) and teaching success (e.g., Abiodullah, et al., 2020; Krishnan & Awang, 2020; Ponmozhi & Ezhilbharathy, 2017), both being directly related to teacher motivation. Thus, the finding of the current study as regards the effect of emotional intelligence on teachers' motivational changes lends some support to the findings of the studies reported above concerning the relationship between high levels of emotional intelligence, on the one hand, and self-efficacy and teaching success, on the other hand.

The result of data analysis for the second research question which probed the teachers' motivational fluctuations resulting from seniority and experience indicated that seniority does make a difference in teachers' motivational intensity. In other words, teachers with higher experience were shown to enjoy a relatively higher degree of motivation. Though the differences existing between the mean motivational levels of teachers based on seniority were not statistically significant, some evidence of this difference was reported in the current study. However, it occurs to the current researchers that at times the opposite case holds true in most cases, that is to say, teachers with higher experience usually face burnout, and hence their motivation level declines (e.g., Mohammadi et al. 2023). Thus, the finding obtained in the current study runs contrary to the one reported in Mohammadi et al.'s (2023) research, as the current study finding implies that teachers with more experience don't face burnout, and hence their motivation remains at a high level, as opposed to less experienced teachers. However, some evidence for the contribution of experience and seniority to teachers' high motivational intensity can be gathered from the studies carried out by researchers like Barber et al (2020) and Dewaele et al. (2018). Both these studies, similar to the current study, substantiated the positive correlation between teachers' EI and their teaching experience.

Finally, the analysis of qualitative data for the third and last research question, which strove to pinpoint the factors contributing to changes in teachers' motivation during the instructional session, specified five preponderant themes, namely *the effect of teaching materials, the role of different time intervals during the session and class timing, the influence of lessons and instructional topics, the role of learner factors* and *the role of internet speed and network quality.* The role of different time intervals in creating motivational fluctuations in teachers partly corroborates the

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finding obtained by Mohammadzadeh and Alavinia (2021) and Waninge et al. (2014), the difference being that their studies focused on motivational fluctuations in learners, while the current study focused on the teacher community.

Also, the influence of lessons and instructional topics, as evidenced in the current study, is consistent with the findings of investigations conducted by Kruk's (2013), MacIntyre and Serroul (2015), and Mohammadi and Alavinia (2021). All these three studies highlighted the effect of task type on fluctuations in learners' motivation. Though, unlike these studies, the current investigation worked on the teacher participants, the findings of the present study can provide partial support for the ones reported by Kruk (2013), MacIntyre and Serroul (2015), and Mohammadi and Alavinia (2021).

Furthermore, the role of learner factors, as shown in the current study, are in line with the findings of Arslan (2021), who claimed that learners' attention and concentration can act as an influential factor in determining motivational changes in teachers. This finding is also in keeping with that of Sak (2022) who concluded that learners' disruptive behavior may diminish the motivational level in teachers. Additionally, the finding corroborates the one attained by Rahmati and Sadeghi (2021), since one of their findings was related to the effect of learners' success on teacher's motivation. Finally, the role of internet speed and network quality, as the other factor reported in the current research to influence teachers' motivational level, lends support to the findings gained in Sun (2011) and Sak's (2022) investigations.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The researchers in the current study set out with the aim of investigating the changes in teachers' motivational states during the online practice of teaching. In doing so, the role of teachers' seniority and emotional intelligence was also explored in relation to their motivational fluctuations. The findings underscored the effect of emotional intelligence and teaching experience on the intensity of teachers' motivation, though the influence was not found to be statistically significant. Moreover, a variety of factors were identified as the underlying causes of teachers' motivational fluctuations from the teachers' perspective.

Though providing the research community with illuminating results as regards the factors bringing about motivational changes in teachers, the current study is not void of limitations. The first and foremost challenge encountered in the study was getting access to sufficient number of participants who were willing to cooperate, particularly owing to the fact that the number of teachers who were involved with online teaching was comparatively low and hence difficult to access. Thus, the future researchers interested in the topic are recommended to opt for a larger number of participants to increase the generalizability of the results. The second limitation of the study was its reliance on a cohort of ILI teachers mainly from different cities across West Azerbaijan. Informed by this limitation, future researchers might choose to select a more representative sample by including the participants from other language schools as well as other cities and provinces in the country. Another complication which the researchers confronted was gaining consent from the managers of language schools where online classes were still held after the pandemic. To get around this issue and in view of the scarcity of online classes as opposed to on-site, face-to-face courses, the future investigators are recommended to perform comparative studies between online and face-to-face conditions for learning. The next limitation of the study, and an inevitable one, was its reliance on self-report data for both emotional intelligence scale and Motometer. This issue might be partly resolved by opting for a variety of data collection tools to both triangulate the data collection process, and come up with more reliable findings.

After all, the findings of the study at hand are thought to be productive in raising the teachers' awareness about their own motivational states and fluctuations. Furthermore, by considering the points of time at which they are at higher motivational levels, the teachers might be able to use those moments of high motivational degree as a platform for effectively planning their teaching to reach the desirable outcomes. The findings can also be fruitful for teacher educators and class observers, and provide them with insights as regards their interaction with the teachers. It goes without saying that teachers play a seminal role in motivating learners and helping them achieve their learning goals. Thus, motivated teachers who are cognizant of their motivational status and the factors leading to changes in their motivation, can do a better job in sparking more motivation in their learners.

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